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Prophet's Love and Toleration for the Humankind

The Prophet Muhammad is introduced in the Qur'an in these words:

And We have not sent you forth but as a mercy to mankind (21:107).

This shows that his distinctive quality was that he was a blessing incarnate in word and deed.

According to a tradition recorded in the *Sahih* of Imam Muslim, when his opponents greatly increased their persecution, his Companions asked him to curse them. At this the Prophet replied, "I have not been sent to lay a curse upon men but to be a blessing to them." His opponents continued to treat him and his Companions with injustice and cruelty, but he always prayed for them.

Once he was so badly stoned by his enemies that the blood began to spurt from all over his body. This happened when he went to Ta'if, where the Hijaz aristocracy used to while away their summer days. When he attempted to call them to Islam, instead of listening to his words of wisdom, they set the street urchins upon him, who kept chasing him till nightfall. Even at that point, when he was utterly exhausted and bleeding from head to foot, all he said was: "O my Lord, guide my people along the true path as they are ignorant of the truth."

His heart was filled with intense love for all human kind irrespective of caste, creed, or colour. Once he advised his companions to regard all people as their brothers and sisters. He added: "You are all Adam's offspring and Adam was born of clay."

All this tells us what kind of awareness he wanted to bring about in man. His mission was to bring people abreast of the reality that all men and women, although inhabiting different regions of the world, and seemingly different from one another as regards their colour, language, dress, culture, etc., were each other's blood brothers. Hence a proper relationship will be established between all human beings only if they regard one another as sisters and brothers. Only then will proper feelings of love and respect prevail throughout the world.

According to a *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), the Prophet once said, "A true believer is one with whom others feel secure. One who returns love for hatred." The Prophet made it clear that one who would only return love for love was on a lower ethical plane. We should never think it is only if people treat us well, that we should treat them well. We should rather be accustomed to being good to those who are not good to us and to not wronging those who harm us.

The Prophet once borrowed some money from a Jew. After a few days the Jew came to demand payment of his debt. The Prophet told him that at that moment he had nothing to pay him with. The Jew said that he won't let him go until he had paid him back. And so the Jew stayed there, from morning till night,

holding the Prophet captive. At that time the Prophet was the established ruler of Medina and could have easily taken action against him. His Companions naturally wanted to rebuke the man and chase him away. But the Prophet forbade this, saying, "The Lord has forbidden us to wrong anyone." The Jew continued to hold the Prophet captive until the following morning. But with the first light of dawn, the Jew was moved by the Prophet's tolerance, and he thereupon embraced Islam. In spite of being a rich man, he had detained the Prophet the day before on account of a few pence. But now the Prophet's noble conduct had had such an impact on him that he was willing to give all his wealth to the Prophet, saying, "Spend it as you please."

According to another *hadith*, the Prophet once said: "By God, he is not a believer, by God, he is not a believer; by God, he is not a believer, with whom his neighbours are not secure." This *hadith* shows how much he loved and cared for all human beings. One of the lessons he taught was that we should live among others like flowers, and not like thorns, without giving trouble to anybody.

In another *hadith* the Prophet said: "If a believer is not able to benefit others, he must at least do them no harm." This shows that to the Prophet the man who becomes useful to others leads his life on a higher plane. But if he fails to do so, he should at least create no trouble for his fellow men. For a man to be a really good servant of God, he must live in this world as a no-problem person. There is no third option.

The Prophet's own example is testified to by Anas ibn Malik who served the Prophet for ten years. He says that the Prophet never ever rebuked him. "When I did something, he never questioned my manner of doing it; and when I did not do something, he never questioned my failure to do it. He was the most good-natured of all men." Such conduct gained him the respect even of his enemies and his followers stood by him through all kinds of hardship and misfortune. He applied the principles on which his own life was based in equal measure to those who followed his path and to those who had harmed or disconcerted him.

It could never happen in the present world that everyone's' thinking, tastes, aptitude, likes and dislikes exactly coincided. For many reasons, differences do arise in this world. But then, what is the permanent solution to the problem? The solution lies in tolerance, called *i'raz* in Arabic. The Prophet's entire life served as a perfect example of this principle. According to his wife, 'A'isha, "He was a personification of the Qur'an."

That is to say, the Prophet moulded his own life in accordance with the ideal pattern of life which he presented to others in the form of the Qur'an. He never beat a servant, or a woman, or anyone else. He did, of course, fight for what was right. Yet, when he had to choose between two alternatives, he would take the easier course, provided it involved no sin.' No one was more careful to avoid sin than he. He never sought revenge – on his own behalf – for any wrong done to him personally. Only if God's commandments had been broken would he mete out retribution for the sake of God. It was such conduct which gained the Prophet universal respect.

In the early Meccan period when the antagonists far exceeded the Prophet's companions in number, it often happened that when the Prophet would stand to pray, his detractors would come near him and whistle and clap in order to disturb him, but the Prophet did not even once show his anger at such acts. He always opted for the policy of tolerance and avoidance of confrontation.

When the Prophet migrated to Medina he built the first mosque known as Masjid al-Nabi (Mosque of the Prophet), considered to be the second most sacred mosque in Islam.

One day the Prophet was sitting in the mosque along with his companions. A Bedouin entered the mosque and started urinating. The Companions rushed to catch him and give him a good beating. But the Prophet did not allow them to do so. After the Bedouin had urinated, he asked his companions to bring a bucket of water and wash the place. Afterwards the, Prophet called the man and with gentleness and affection explained to him that this was a place of worship and that it should be kept clean.

When the opposition became very strong the Prophet left Mecca for Medina. But his antagonists did not leave him in peace. They began to attack Medina. In this way a state of war prevailed between the Muslims and non-Muslims.

Since the Prophet avoided war at all costs, he strove to bring about a peace agreement between him and the Meccans. After great efforts on his part, the non-Muslims agreed to the finalizing of a 10-year peace treaty, which was drafted and signed at the Al-Hudaybiyyah.

While the Al-Hudaybiyyah treaty was being drafted, the Meccans indulged in a number of extremely provocative acts. For instance, the agreement mentioned the Prophet's name as 'Muhammad the Messenger of God.' They insisted that the phrase 'the messenger of God' should be taken out, and be replaced simply by 'Muhammad, son of Abdullah'. The Prophet accepted their unreasonable condition and deleted the appellation with his own hands. Similarly, they made the condition that if they could lay their hands on any Muslim they would make him a hostage, but if the Muslims succeeded in detaining any non-Muslim, they would have to set him free. The Prophet even relented on this point. For the restoration of peace in the region, the Prophet accepted a number of such unjustifiable clauses as were added by the enemy. In this way he set the example of peace and tolerance being linked with one another. If we desire peace, we must tolerate many unpleasant things from others. There is no other way to establish peace in society.

Once the Prophet was seated at some place in Medina, along with his companions. During this time a funeral (procession) passed by. On seeing this the Prophet stood up. Seeing the Prophet stand, up, one of his Companion remarked that the funeral was that of a Jew, that is, a non-Muslim. The Prophet replied, 'Was he not a human being?'

This incident illustrates how an atmosphere of mutual love and compassion can be brought about in the world only when we consciously rise above all insidious demarcation of caste, colour and creed. Just as the Prophet did, we too must look at all men as human beings who deserve to be respected at all events.

Farida Khanam

The Spiritual Goal of Islam

What is the spiritual goal of Islam? That is, what is that spiritual target which Islam sets before man? The answer in the words of the Qur'an is: 'A soul at rest' (89:27). Thus the spiritual goal of Islam is to attain this state of peace in the soul.

According to the Qur'an this is the ultimate stage in a man's spiritual development. When he reaches this stage of progress, he qualifies himself to be ushered into Paradise, the perfect and eternal world of the Hereafter. The Qur'an addresses such souls in these words: 'O serene soul! Return to your Lord joyful, and pleasing in His sight. Join My servants and enter My paradise' (89:27-30).

In this world man has to lead his life in circumstances in which he experiences various kinds of situations: there are times of gain, times of loss; times of happiness and times of grief. Sometimes he receives good treatment at the hands of others, at other times his fate is quite otherwise.

The ideal human being of the Qur'an is one who undergoes all these experiences without losing his integrity. Under no circumstances is his inner peace disturbed. However, untoward the occasion, he can maintain his natural balance. Success does not make him proud. Power does not make him haughty. No bad treatment by others drives him to seek vengeance in anger. At all events, he remains serene. It is such a man who is called 'a peaceful soul' in the Qur'an. And it is this man who, according to the Qur'an, has achieved the highest spiritual state.

The realization of God joins man to his Maker. Such communion with the divine brings about a state of spiritual elevation. Having been thus raised to a higher plane of existence, man becomes of a 'sublime character,' (68:4) as it is expressed in the Qur'an.

This can be illustrated by an example from the natural world: The process of conversion of a substance from the solid to the gaseous state, is called boiling. The boiling point of a liquid varies according to atmospheric pressure. At sea level, water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. At a higher altitude, as on a mountain, the atmospheric pressure is less, so the boiling point is lower. This shows that it is the altitude that makes the difference.

The law of nature governing this world accounts for the difference made by altitude. Islam's aim is to foster human beings whose altitude has changed. The superior qualities desired in him will come later, on their own.

Just as the Prophet of Islam was God's messenger, so also was he a perfect example of the peaceful soul. By studying his life, one can learn the nature of God's ideal man, that is, a peaceful soul. In the Qur'an the Prophet Muhammad is described as an example of "sublime character" (68:4).

When is it that a man's spiritual progress brings him to the state of peace? The best way to describe the soul being at complete rest is to give certain examples from the life of the Prophet of Islam.

The Prophet's name was Muhammad, meaning the praised one or the praiseworthy. But when the Meccans became his most dire opponents, they themselves coined a name for the Prophet, 'Muzammam,' on the pattern of 'Muhammad,' *Muzammam* meaning condemned. They used to heap abuses on him calling him by this epithet of *Muzammam*. But the Prophet was never enraged at this distorted version of his name. All he said in return was: "Aren't you surprised that God has turned away the abuses of the Quraysh from me. They abuse a person by the name of *Muzammam*. Whereas I am *Muhammad* (Ibn Hisham, 1/379).

This meant that abuses were being heaped on a person whose name was *Muzammam*. Since the Prophet's name was *Muhammad*, not *Muzammam*, their abuses did not apply to him. Such a reaction can come only from a person whose intellectual level is very high; who can rise above praise and criticism.

One day the Prophet was sitting with his companions in Madinah when a funeral procession passed by. The Prophet stood up. His Companions pointed out that it was the funeral of a Jew, that is, a non-Muslim. The Prophet replied: 'Was he not a human being?' (*Fathul Bari*, 3/214).

This incident shows that the Prophet was looking at the matter by separating two different aspects of the Jew, that is, his being non-Muslim, and his being a human being. At that moment he overlooked his non-Muslim identity and saw him simply as a human being.

It is only a man who, in the words of the Qur'an has acquired a sublime character who can show such respect for every human being. It is only one whose spiritual progress has elevated his mental level who can do honour to one of another creed.

On another occasion the Prophet of Islam was in the Masjid al-Nabwi in Medina, the second most sacred mosque in Islam, when a Bedouin, that is, a desert Arab, entered the mosque and urinated inside it. It was obviously a very provocative matter. But the Prophet was not at all provoked. After the nomad had urinated, the Prophet simply asked his companions to bring a bucket of water and wash the place clean. (*Fathul Bari*, 1/386).

This is a clear example of the kind of behaviour one may expect of a man with a peaceful soul. The Prophet's keeping cool at such obvious provocation was possible only because he had attained the highest state of spirituality. He had risen above all negative feelings.

These examples make it clear what a peaceful soul is. The peaceful soul is one which being on a higher spiritual plane, can live in tranquility, regardless of the circumstances. It subsists within its own self. No external event can disturb its inner peace.

Nowadays people often tend to look at the history of kings in order to understand Islam. But this is not the proper way to study it. One needs only to study the careers of today's political leaders to be able to understand the nature of the Muslim kings of bygone days. Today's political leaders are, in reality, exploiters. In a similar way most of the Muslim kings of the later phase of Islam were also exploiters. To achieve their political ends, they exploited the name of Islam. As such, these Muslim kings were in no way the true representatives of Islam.

To me, those known as sufis or Muslim mystics were far better representatives of the spirit of Islam. The Muslim sufis embraced such values of Islam as love, peace, and kindness, and made an effort to spread these virtues all over the world. And that is the true spirit of Islam.

At this point, I would like to relate certain incidents relating to Muslim sufis, which illustrate their mission and which throw light on the real spirit of Islam.

Sheikh Nizamuddin Aulia was a great Muslim Sufi of the 13th century. The story goes that once a disciple of the Sheikh visited him. He offered him a gift of a pair of scissors, a product of his home town. When the Sheikh saw this gift, he remarked politely:

'What am I to do with this gift? It would have been better had you brought me a needle and thread. Scissors cut things apart, while a needle and thread join things together. You know my job is to unite people, and not to separate them.'

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, a famous sufi of India, one day arose to perform his ablutions. Having been brought a jug of water by his disciple, he sat down at one place to begin his ablutions, but then he got up again and went to another place. From there too he got up. Only when he had gone to a third place did he finally perform his ablutions.

The disciple found this very strange. With proper reverence he observed, 'Sir, you have done something new. Twice you sat at different places and then got up and finally you performed your ablutions at a third place.' Maulana Thanawi answered that at the first two places he had found ants creeping about on the ground. He thought that if he dropped water on them, they would be in trouble. Finally he had gone to a third place where there were no ants, and only then did he perform his ablutions.

This shows that when we should not harm even tiny creatures such as ants and earthworms, the harming of human beings is out of question. We ought to live in this world doing no harm and giving no pain. That is in the true spirit of Islam.

Another incident relating to a Muslim saint very aptly illustrates the spirit of the mystic individual. The story goes that once when a Muslim sufi was travelling with his disciples, he encamped near a large grove of trees upon which doves used to perch.

During this halt one of the sufi's disciples aimed at one of the doves, killed it, cooked it, then ate it. Afterwards something strange happened. A flock of doves came to the tree under which the sufi was resting and began hovering over it and making a noise.

The Muslim sufi, communicating with the leader of the birds, asked what the matter was and why they were protesting. The leader replied, 'We have a complaint to make against you, that is, one of your disciples has killed one of us.' Then the Muslim sufi called the disciple in question and asked him about it. He said that he had not done anything wrong, as the birds were their foodstuff. He was hungry, so he killed one for food. He thought that in so doing he had not done anything wrong. The sufi then conveyed this reply to the leader of doves.

The leader replied: "Perhaps you have failed to understand our point. Actually what we are complaining about is that all of you came here in the garb of sufis, yet acted as hunters. Had you come here in hunter's garb; we would certainly have remained on the alert. When we saw you in the guise of sufis, we thought that we were safe with you and remained perched on the top of the tree without being properly vigilant."

This anecdote very aptly illustrates the reality of a true mystic or spiritual person. One who has reached an advanced stage of spiritual uplift, having found the true essence of religion, no longer has the will or the capacity to do harm. He gives others life, not death. He benefits others, doing injury to no one. In short; he lives among the people like the rose and not the thorn. He has nothing but love in his heart to bestow upon others.

Conclusion

To sum it up, according to Islam, the highest spiritual goal for man is his spiritual uplift when he has attained the high state called 'peaceful soul' in the Qur'an. This may also be termed as complex-free soul which can withstand all kinds of negativity.

Thus a developed or complex-free soul is one which, having reached a high level of thinking, has risen from all kinds of negativity and has attained a positive identity in the full sense of the word.

The importance of the peaceful soul, according to Islam, is its being deserving of salvation and thus eligible to enter the purest and finest realm of paradise.

The way to reach the stage of the peaceful soul depends upon man's relation to God. The more man turns his attention to God, the more he will receive inspiration from Him. With the help of divine inspiration, he will be able to pass through the various stages of spiritual uplift until he ultimately reaches that pinnacle of sublimity so desired by the Almighty.

This paper was presented by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan at a conference held by the Institute of Gandhian Studies, Wardha, on September 22, 1995

Seeking the Pleasure of God

According to the Qur'an and the Hadith, a good deed is one which is essentially intended to seek the pleasure of God (57:27). Devoid of this spirit, any deed will be as good as worthless when the final reckoning comes.

God does not go by appearances. He sees the inner motive called 'intent' in the Shariah. Looked at from this angle, deeds could be of two kinds, those that are committed to seek the pleasure of God, and those aimed at pleasing human beings.

The focal point of the man whose aim is to seek the pleasure of God will be his Creator. He seeks to find out whether or not his actions will meet with the approval of his Lord. His dealings are always determined by the principle of truth. His speech and movements are always directed by the will of God. Even if all other human beings have turned against him, or he is shunned by them, he is not deterred from following the path of truth.

On the contrary, the focus of attention of the man whose aim is to please human beings is man instead of God. He looks up to his group, his party and his human patrons in all matters. His language is couched in such terms as to please men, and his actions are calculated to win popularity among human beings.

However, the individual whose aim is to seek the pleasure of God becomes sensitive in the highest degree to all matters relating to God. He can ignore anything but divine dictates, whereas those who seek the pleasure of men become extremely sensitive in matters relating to men. They begin to show such consideration to men as only God deserves.

The former will find their abode in heaven, while the latter will be consigned to hellfire.

Liberalism and Fundamentalism

I should like, first of all, to define the terms liberalism and fundamentalism. To arrive at universally acceptable definition has never been an easy task, but I think that good, workable definition of liberalism and fundamentalism should be, respectively, reason-based thinking, as opposed to scripture-based thinking.

Once we accept these definitions, we have a set of criteria by which to judge the actions of both liberals and fundamentalists. However, what we find, in the light of these criteria, is that neither group has truly adhered to its professed doctrines. Neither have the liberals been guided by reason, nor have the fundamentalists been by the scriptures.

In the Indian context, the Shah Bano case provides a telling example by which to judge the validity of the respective stands adopted by these two groups. During this case, such emphasis was laid on the fact that, according to the Islamic Shariah, a divorced wife was entitled only to temporary provision by her husband; she did not have the right to ask for permanent maintenance. This point was seized upon and highlighted by the liberals in order to prove that Islamic Law was in need of revision, without which it was not practicable in modern times.

To my way of thinking, in this case, the liberals neither thought nor acted reasonably. Had reason been appealed to, the liberals ought surely to have accepted the reality of the western world having already tried – and found wanting – the system of permanent maintenance for a divorced wife. Western laws, in obliging the ex-husband to pay permanent maintenance to his ex-wife, placed the man at an irreversible disadvantage. It is hardly surprising then that divorce having proved so costly time and again, attitudes to marriage began to change. As a result, more than fifty per cent of the young couples living together today are unwed, so that when they separate, the man does not have to pay for the maintenance of his former partner. Seen in the light of reason, the option, in reality, is not between permanent or temporary maintenance, but between any kind of provision and complete sexual anarchy. This being the reality, is it proper for liberals to ignore the experience of the west and blindly ridicule Islamic Law? The adoption of such a stance runs counter both to reason and to religion.

The position adopted by the fundamentalists in the Shah Bano case was flared in much the same manner as that of the liberals, in that it did not derive from or conform to the principles propounded by them. When the verdict in favour of maintenance was given, Muslim fundamentalists raised a great hue and cry against the Supreme Court's decision, completely ignoring the fact that to do so was quite against the teachings of the Qur'an.

Consider the almost parallel case which took place in Medina during the lifetime of the Prophet. A Muslim, called Basheer, who once had a dispute with a Jew, could have referred his case to the Prophet and been given a verdict based on the Shari'ah. But he chose, instead, to take his problems to a Jew by the name of Kaab Bin Ashraf, who used to settle any disputes referred to him. The Qur'an comments on this incident, but has nothing to say against Kaab Bin Ashraf. On the contrary, the Qur'an only condemned the Muslim for taking his case to this Jew instead of the Prophet. That is to say that the scriptures condemned the verdict-seeker rather than the verdict-giver.

Notwithstanding this Qur'anic example, the Muslim fundamentalists of India, without exception, kept silent on the subject of the verdict-seeker. Their entire animus was directed against the Supreme Court, in so doing, the Muslim fundamentalists were following, not their Scriptures, but personal whims.

According to the Qur'an (46:4), there are two sources of knowledge, one established, the other revealed. It would be correct to say that, in principle, the liberal group bases its judgement in established knowledge, while the fundamentalist group stands by revealed knowledge. But if the fundamentalists had genuinely adhered to the Scriptures, they would have diverted their campaign against the verdict-seeker rather than against the verdict-giver (i.e., the Court). Similarly, if the liberals had been true to their own professed doctrines, they would, as a matter of principle, have admitted the veracity of Islamic Law in this particular instance, rather than get about discrediting

Understanding India

1993 has been a year of meetings for me. During this period I have travelled extensively throughout the country in order to attend a number of conferences and seminars and in the process have met people from a broad cross-section of society. Most of the people I met seemed to have lost their optimism about the way this country is going to develop. But I differ from them. I am still full of hope for India's future.

It is my firm belief that despair runs counter to nature's overall system and that like any other kind of negativism it is unworthy of serious consideration. Have we forgotten, perhaps, that even the blackest of nights is followed by the sunrise? This sequence of events is so totally and perfectly predictable that an astronomer can tell with confidence the exact moment the sun will rise one thousand years from today. In a world, therefore, in which day will quite unfailingly follow night every twenty four hours ad infinitum, how is it possible that the darkness of despair will not be dispelled by the light of hope?

Here is an illustration of this point. On December 6, 1992, when the Babri Mosque was demolished, many newspapers made the assertion that this would turn out to be only the first of a long series of such incidents, anything from 300 to 3,000 mosques having been targeted by extremists for demolition. But my interpretation of the situation was quite the reverse. I said that no other mosque was going to be demolished, for what we had witnessed was not the beginning of anti-masjid politics but the end.

This may appear strange today, but both communities very soon gave their tacit approval to the idea that Muslims should forget about their one mosque and Hindus should forget about the many mosques that, in the heat of the moment, they felt should be demolished. Though there is still some talk, on both sides, in the former antagonistic vein, passions are definitely cooling over what is, after all, an anachronism which cannot continue indefinitely.

What underlay my own personal conviction about how this situation would develop was substantial historical evidence that destruction having run its course, must ultimately abate and come to an end. The entire history of mankind abounds in such instances.

However, a welcome panacea to cut short present ills would be the general acceptance of pluralism. But upholders of this principle have first to contend with the problem – nay, threat – of 'cultural nationalism'. The proponents of this latter movement insist that India's composite culture must be moulded into a uni-Indian culture, being of the view that it is only through such endeavour that social harmony can be produced.

Serious-minded people regard this movement as a genuine threat to the integrity of the country. This is because any attempt to replace the existing cultural set-up with an artificially formulated 'culture' would

bring in its wake a fresh spate of strife and dissension. Such steps, disruptive as they are of the status quo, can never produce social harmony.

I do not, however, see any real danger in such a movement, for the simple reason that those who set themselves up against nature are bound to fall far short of their objectives. Their goals, could they but grasp this fact, are unrealizable.

Those who advocate changing the 'composite' culture of the country show their ignorance of the fact that culture is almost always of an inherently composite nature. Culture is not something which can be formulated in some office, or in some meeting or conference: it is invariably the result of a long and natural process of social action, reaction and interaction. Far from being the instant fallout of some political resolution, it is the culmination of a time-honoured, historical accretion. This being so, I regard cultural nationalism, or uni-culturalism as being against the laws of nature. Not even a super power can fly in the face of nature.

Besides, where uni-culture smacks of narrow-mindedness, multi-culture stands for broadmindedness. I cannot believe that my countrymen would be so foolish as to prefer to be narrow-minded. In July, 1993, a meeting was held in New Delhi in memory of Mr. Girilal Jain the former editor of the *Times of India*. Speaking on this occasion, the present editor, Mr. Dilip Padgaonkar, made the point that because the human identity is composed of so many elements, it can never be thought of as being limited in form. According to influences which had shaped his own life, he mentioned being born into a particular family and growing up with a particular mother tongue and having the religion of his social background. When he went abroad to different countries, there were other influences which went into the shaping of his identity. Many of these elements became inseparable parts of his psyche. Describing the vastness of the human personality, he said, "I am large enough to contain all these contradictions."

I think these words convey the spirit not only of India but also of humanity in its broadest sense. In terms of the sense of identity which a language confers, there are still complaints about the non-fulfillment of promises made by Indian leaders prior to 1947, that 'Hindustani' written in both Persian and Devnagri scripts would be the national language of liberated India. The later decision to make Hindi the official language of post-independence India is still regarded as an affront and a deliberately limiting factor. But, in the context of the present day, I regard all this lamentation over Hindi's predominance as having little or no relevance.

Language may be an important part of a composite culture, but it is not minted by a handful of people. It comes into being after centuries of development. When Muslims came to India, they brought with them Arabic and Persian. At that time many languages were spoken in Delhi and the surrounding areas, such as Haryani, Punjabi, Khadi Boli, Brijbhasha, Rajasthani, etc. With the interaction of Muslims and the local people, a new language began to develop. This language came to be known as Hindustani. It was a common language formed by deriving words from both foreign and local languages. Even today, it is the language of many people in India, although Muslims remain more Urdu-oriented, while Hindus,

generally speaking, are more Hindi-oriented. It is significant that all the major Hindi dailies use Hindustani written in Devnagri script, that being the only really understandable language for the majority of the Indian people.

Muslims, however, still make a grievance of this use of Devnagri script. But they are wrong to do so. If they were simply to apply themselves to learning this script along with Urdu script they would find that they could have easy access not only to news and journalistic commentary but to a much wider field of literature and general information that is available to them at present. Devnagri script, being phonetic, is easy to learn, and its acquisition would bring it home to Muslims, once they began to make use of it, that the prevalent national language in actuality is Hindustani rather than Hindi, a language with which they have been familiar all their lives. They should learn a lesson from the many Hindu Punjabi officials who were schooled in Persian and Urdu, but who, after independence had suddenly to make the transition from Urdu to Hindi in their official work, without their ever having had any previous knowledge of Devnagri script. No one says that this changeover was easy, but the fact remains that it was successfully accomplished by dint of personal endeavour. Muslims must begin to see linguistic change as the need of the hour.

Whatever the concomitant pressures on the national identity, it should be borne in mind that the future of a nation, inevitably shaped as it is by historical forces, is never carved out by just a single individual, or a single group. And India is no exception to this rule.

20 November-December 1995

WOMAN BETWEEN ISLAM AND WESTERN SOCIETY

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The status of woman in Islam is the same as that of man. Injunctions about honour and respect enjoined for one sex are enjoined equally for the other sex. So far as rights in this world and rewards in the Hereafter are concerned, there is *no* difference between the sexes. In the organization of daily living, both are equal participants and partners. Yet Islam sees man as man and woman as woman and, considering the natural differences, it advocates the principle of the division of labour between the two sexes rather than the equality of labour.

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The Policy of Peace in Islam

How to attain normalcy in Jerusalem

According to the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace, a believer is one with whom one can trust one's life and property. That is because Islam is a religion of peace. The Qur'an calls its way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy, (4:128) and states quite plainly that God abhors disturbance of the peace (2:205).

Yet, in this world, for one reason or the other, peace remains elusive. Differences – political and apolitical – keep on arising between individuals and groups, Muslims and non-Muslims. Whenever people refuse to be tolerant of these differences, insisting that they be rooted out the moment they arise, there is bound to be strife. Peace, as a result, can never prevail in this world.

One recent example is the ever-recurring conflict over Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a very ancient, historic city with a unique value for all the millions of people of different religious persuasions who believe it to be their very own Sacred Place. Jerusalem is, indeed, a symbol and centre of inspiration for the three great Semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For Jews, it is a living proof of their ancient grandeur, and the pivot of their national history. For Christians, it is the scene of their Saviour's agony and triumph. For Muslims, it is the first halting place on the Prophet's mystic journey, and also the site of one of Islam's most sacred Shrines. Thus, for all three faiths, it is a centre of pilgrimage, while for Muslims it is the third holiest place of worship.

Now the question arises as to how, when it is a place of worship for all three religions, it can be freely accessible to all. How can the adherents of all the three religions have the opportunity there to satisfy their religious feelings?

Nowadays, all around us, we hear the slogan: "Jerusalem is ours." The raising of this slogan by different parties clearly shows that each one desires political supremacy for itself. All the three believe that without political dominance over this sacred city, they cannot worship God in the proper sense of the word.

If the condition for visiting this sacred place were that only that person or group could visit it who enjoyed political dominance there, Jerusalem would be turned from a place of peaceful worship into a battlefield. As political power can be wielded by only one religious group at a time, the other two groups, who are not in power, will constantly be in opposition to it. In this way, a place which should remain perfectly 'tranquil' will be eternally rent by clash and confrontation. As a result, not even the group in power will have the opportunity to perform its religious rites in peace.

This is indeed a very practical and important question which demands a serious rethinking. I would like to deal here briefly with the position of Islam in this matter.

The first indirect reference to Jerusalem appears in the 17th surah of the Qur'an. It says: 'Glory be to 'Him who made His Servant go by night from the Sacred Mosque to the distant Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that we might show him some of Our Signs' (17:1). Prior to the emigration in early 622, the Prophet Muhammad went on an extraordinary journey called Mi'raj (Ascension) in the history of Islam. Through God's unseen arrangement, this journey took the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem. There, according to the belief of the Muslims, he performed a prayer in congregation with all the Prophets who had been his forerunners at the holy site of al-Masjid al-Aqsa (*al Bayt al-Maqdis*).

Another reference to Jerusalem appears in one of the sayings of the Prophet recorded in all the six authentic books of Hadith with minor differences in wording. According to this tradition, there are only three mosques to which a journey may be lawfully made for the purpose of saying one's prayers—al-Masjid al-Haram of Mecca, al-Masjid al-Nabi of Medina and al-Masjid al-Aqsa of Jerusalem. (Certain traditions use the name Masjid Ilia for the Masjid al-Aqsa in Palestine.) Yet another tradition tells us that there is a far greater reward for praying in these three mosques than in any other mosque.

We learn, however, from the Qur'an that in no part of the world can political power be wielded indefinitely by the same nation or group: 'We bring these days to men by turns' (3:140). Given that power changes hands from time to time between different communities, how are believers to worship at al-Masjid al-Aqsa? Whereas each Muslim has a natural desire to enter this mosque and prostrate himself before God as the Prophet Muhammad and the other Prophets did.

According to the Qur'an, political power, by the very law of nature, cannot forever remain with one nation. In that case, if this act of worship is linked with the notion that a Muslim can receive God's blessings only when this land is under Muslim political rule, millions of Muslims would have had to bury this desire in their hearts and leave this world with this cherished desire unfulfilled, as it happened with the former Saudi king Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz (1906-1975). They would never have had, the unique experience of prostrating themselves before Almighty God at a place where the Prophet Muhammad, along with all the Prophets, had prostrated himself before his Lord.

What is the solution to this problem? Its solution lies in a practice (sunnah) of the Prophet Muhammad: to separate the religious from the political aspect of the matter. This would enable men of religion to solve the problem by applying what is called 'practical wisdom,' that is, to avoid the present problems and grasp the available opportunities. By following this process, they would be able to fulfill their cherished religious desire of which they have been denied unnecessarily so far. In the process, they would be able to avoid confrontational situations. Here are some telling examples of this sunnah of the Prophet.

1. The Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina in July 622. For the first year and a half in Medina (i.e. till the end of 623) he and his companions prayed in the direction of al-Bayt al-Maqdis in Jerusalem. At the beginning of 624, the faithful, were enjoined, by Qur'anic revelation, to face in the direction of the Sacred Ka'ba at Mecca to say their prayers (2:144).

When this injunction regarding the Qiblah (direction of prayer) was revealed, 360 idols were still in position in the Ka'bah, at that time a long-established centre of polytheism. The presence of these idols must certainly have made Muslims feel reluctant to face in the direction of the Ka'bah at prayer time. How could believers in monotheism turn their faces towards what was, in effect, a structure strongly associated with polytheism? It is significant that along with the change of Qiblah came the injunction to treat this problem as a matter requiring patience, and not to hesitate in facing the Ka'bah: "O believers, seek assistance in prayer. God is with those who are patient" (2:153).

As history tells us, this state of affairs continued for six long years, till the conquest of Mecca (630) when the Ka'bah was cleared of idols. This establishes a very important principle of Islam which may be termed as *Al-fasl bayn al-qaziyatayn*, that is, the separation of two different facets of a problem from each other. According to this principle, the Ka'bah and the idols were given separate consideration. By remaining patient on the issue of the presence of the idols, believers were able to accept the Ka'bah as the direction for prayer.

2. Another such example is the above mentioned heavenly journey (*Isra* or *Mi'ra*) undertaken by the Prophet before the emigration in 622. At that juncture, Jerusalem was ruled by Iranians, that is to say, by non-Muslims. The Iranian ruler, Khusroe Parvez, attacked Jerusalem in 614, wresting it from the Romans, who had governed it since 63 B.C. This political dominance of the Iranian empire ended only when the Roman Emperor Heraclius defeated the Iranians and restored Roman rule over Jerusalem in 629.

This means that, before his emigration, the Prophet Muhammad entered Jerusalem on his *Mi'raj* journey to say his prayer at the Masjid al-Aqsa at a time when the city was under the rule of a non-Muslim king. From this we derive the very important sunnah of the Prophet that worship and politics practically belong to separate spheres, and, as such, should not be confused with one another.

3. The third example took place after the Hijrah in 629. At that time, Mecca was entirely under the domination of the idolatrous Quraysh. In spite of that, the Prophet and his companions came to Mecca from Medina to spend three days there to perform Umrah (the minor pilgrimage) and the circumambulation of the Ka'bah. This was possible solely because the Prophet did not mix worship with politics. If the Prophet had thought that Umra could be performed only when Mecca came under Muslim political rule, he would never have entered Mecca for worship along with his companions.

In the light of this sunnah of the Prophet, the solution to the present problem of Jerusalem lies in separating the issue of worship from that of political supremacy. Muslims belonging to Palestine, or any other country, should be able to go freely to Jerusalem in order to pray to God in the Aqsa Mosque. Worship should be totally disassociated from political issues.

To sum it up, the only practical solution to the problem of Jerusalem, in present circumstances, is to apply the above principle of *Al-fasl bayn al-qaziyatayn* to this matter, that is, to keep the two aspects of a controversial issue separate from one another. There is no other possible solution to the problem of Jerusalem. We ought to keep the political aspect apart from its religious aspect so that no ideological barrier comes in the way of worship by the people, and the faithful are able to go to Jerusalem freely in order to satisfy their religious feelings.

Defining Secularism

The basis of the partition of the country in 1947, at least implicitly, was that India was to be declared a Hindu state, and Pakistan a Muslim state. And it did happen in Pakistan. It was declared a Muslim state. So the logical parallel was to declare India a Hindu state. But one thing in India, prevented such a declaration being made. That was that Hindus had gone sufficiently ahead in modern education for a majority of their educated class to think along non-religious lines, Pandit Nehru being at the apex. It was due to the pressure of these educated Hindus that India was declared a secular state instead of a Hindu state.

This state of affairs was indeed a boon for the Indian Muslims. Unfortunately though, due to the misguided leadership of certain Muslim leaders, they could never place secularism in its correct perspective. Their leaders had told them that secularism meant an anti-religious system. That is why they were never in a position to think about it with clear minds. They could never adjust to this idea.

The interpretation of secularism, quite simply, means 'a worldly or non-religious system.' As such, in a pluralistic society secularism entails a political settlement, whereby religious freedom is granted in private spheres, while the ordinary, everyday worldly spheres of life are dealt with on a non-religious basis. This obviates the kind of dissension which can arise in a society where people of different persuasions exist side by side.

According to this interpretation, secularism cannot be called an anti-religious system. To put it more precisely in the Indian context, secularism can be termed a system of non-interference. That is, the State maintains a policy of non-interference in the religious affairs of various groups, while attending to practical matters of concern to all the groups, on a non-religious basis.

As a result of this misunderstanding by the Muslims, they failed to participate fully in secularism. Those Muslims who openly participated in the secular system were never respected, and never gained credibility among the Muslims. This is the basic reason for secularism not being a complete success in the country.

Although Muslims are numerically in a minority, due to their large numbers they are in the position of being next to the majority in the country. A community in this position has an extremely crucial role to play. It is because of this special position of Muslims that no system in India can be successfully established unless Muslims accept it and extend to it their full cooperation.

All the known records prove that Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and his colleagues were secular in the best sense of the word. Had they received the full support of the Muslim community, they certainly would have succeeded in establishing a secular system in the country.

Whatever the system, secular or Islamic, it can never be perfect in this world of ours. It will always have some shortcoming or the other. India being such a vast country, something or the other will always fall short of the ideal, even if it were an Islamic state. Failing to understand this situation Muslims have repeatedly pinpointed the supposed or real shortcomings of the system and regularly make fiery speeches and write barbed articles which denigrate the system. They accuse the Congress of functioning under the banner of secularism without actually practicing it. As a result, Muslims have continued to give a negative vote, thereby seriously undermining the stability of the Congress, the stability which was necessary to establish a secular system.

For instance, take the question of government service. Seeing that the Muslim ratio was much lower in government jobs, Muslims alleged that the government talked a great deal about secularism but that, in fact, most of the jobs were given to Hindus, not Muslims. This was not the case. The actual reason for the greater number of Hindus in govt jobs was to be found elsewhere. When Muslims in Govt. jobs migrated to Pakistan in large numbers before partition the Hindus who had left their jobs to come to India were naturally given first preference. Automatically, they came to exceed the number of Muslims in govt jobs.

Another reason for the smaller ratio was that Muslims were 100 years behind Hindus in modern education. There were, therefore, far fewer degree holders among Muslims than among Hindus.

For instance, at the Aligarh Muslim University, when the Muslims opened their own medical college, using their own funds, they were forced to employ Hindu professors. The reason being that the Muslims themselves had lagged too far behind in medical education in particular to apply for such positions.

This is traceable to Muslims' lack of awareness of modern imperatives. Their negative response to the opening of the first medical college in Calcutta in 1835 is a matter of history. While Muslims were taking out processions for its closure, Hindus were at the same time seeking admission to it. Muslims in fact could not separate the English from their sciences. Since they were launching movements against British rule, they thought that even their sciences had also to be discarded. It was for reasons such as these that Muslims have suffered in the past and are still suffering the consequences. However, they were quick to lay all the blame at the door of the government, even in places where the go government had no hand.

No system can work efficiently without the cooperation of the public. The government can undertake only 50 percent of the task. The other 50 percent has to be undertaken by the people.

But instead of pulling their weight, which would have meant correcting their own attitude, they ranged themselves against secularism, of which they felt profoundly suspicious. Their failure to improve their own condition in terms of education only made them more rigid in this stance.

Now this state of affairs was exploited by the fundamentalist Hindus. They may not have been the creators of this state of affairs, but I would stress that they have exploited the situation.

Since secularism was upheld by the Congress, and favoured by educated classes everywhere, fundamentalist groups found themselves relegated to the background. The theocratic state was in the process everywhere of being rejected by the enlightened minds. But Muslims did not play their role. This is what is largely responsible for the erosion of secularism. There are certainly other factors, but Muslims' failure to realize the actual meaning of secularism is the most decisive one.

Muslims failed to play their 50 percent part, thus encouraging the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. If the BJP seats in Parliament rose from 2 to 119 the direct responsibility for this must be attributed to the ill-advised leadership of Muslims.

Pandit Nehru had an excellent team of individuals, imbued with the spirit of secularism, in the best sense of the word, but Muslims failed to support them. There were certain Muslims both inside and outside the party who favoured secularism but since our leaders had implanted the wrong idea in people's minds that secularism was anti-Islam, these individuals were never respected in the community, hence they failed to gain the credibility among Muslims which was necessary for them to play an effective role.

Now Muslims will have to change their thinking. They must realize that secularism is not anti-Islam or anti-religion, but that it is the best possible principle on which to run a pluralistic society.

Discovery of God

When persecution at the hands of the Quraysh became insufferable, the Prophet asked some of his Muslim followers to emigrate from Mecca to Abyssinia. There, they were given refuge and found peace and security. When the Quraysh heard about this, they sent two envoys to the king of Abyssinia to demand that the Muslims be returned to them. Najashi, the Abyssinian king, refused to give up those who had sought his protection until they had been allowed to explain their case. Ja'far Abu Talib came forward on behalf of the Muslims: This is what he said: "We used to be an ignorant people, worshipping idols, eating carrion-flesh, committing indecencies, cutting off relationships, and neglecting our neighbours. The strong amongst us used to devour the weak. We remained in this state until God sent us a prophet from our own people: one whose lineage, truthfulness, integrity and chastity were known to us. He called us to One God, urging us to worship Him alone, and to forsake the stones and idols which we and our forefathers had worshipped besides Him. He enjoined us to be truthful and trustworthy; to be kind to relatives and neighbours; to refrain from that which is forbidden to us, and not to spill the blood of others. He forbade indecency and all falsehood, the misappropriation of the property of orphans and the defamation of honourable women. He called on us to worship one God, and no other beside Him. He commanded us to pray, pay the poor-due and fast. Ja'far then listed all the commandments of Islam). So we believe in him, and follow him in the religion that has come to him from God. We started worshipping One God alone, refraining from that which he forbade us, and considering lawful only that which he declared so. But our people turned against us, persecuting us and seeking to entice us away from our religion, and turn us back to worshipping idols instead of God Almighty. They attempted to make us indulge once again in impure things, as we used to. When this persecution and oppression became unbearable, and they came between us and our religion, we emigrated to your land. We preferred you above all others, noble king, and sought your refuge, in the hope that we would not be wronged in your presence.

Najashi then asked Ja'far to read to him some of the Book which had been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Ja'far recited the beginning of the Surah entitled 'Mary'. When Najashi heard these verses, he wept. "This is the same word that Jesus brought to the world," he said; "it emanates from the same source." He then sent the envoys of the Quraysh away, saying that there was no question of his handing over the Muslims to them.

From Ja'far's words we can tell what a momentous impact the discovery of God had made on his life, and how his faith had permeated every corner of his being. When Najashi heard this faith expressed in Ja'far's words, he could not but accede under its impact.

The truth is that with the discovery of God, a new personality grows which is reflected in every action. Religion becomes inseparable from the person it has entered. The full force of his faith is borne out by his every word and action. They are outward expression of the deep faith that has saturated his inner soul.

The eminent should grieve for the lowly

It happened that a woman of Medina, who used to clean the mosque, passed away. She was black-skinned and mentally deranged and there were few to perform her funeral. Those who came to it did not think it proper to inform the Prophet. When he finally heard about it, he asked to be informed of the death of any Muslim in future, irrespective of his or her status.